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SPURIOUS ECSTASY AND CEREMONIAL MAGIC

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THE strongest evidence of man's dissatisfaction with his present status and surroundings is furnished by his desire to transcend the drab routine of life and to escape from himself. The yearning for *ec-stasis* — the desire to stand out beyond his physical limitations — manifests in many ways. Some of these — conventional amusements, aesthetic or religious emotionalism — are innocuous enough, but when they enter the region called occult, many become wholly evil even when initiated with good intentions, whilst one only is otherwise than entirely spurious, transient, and imperilous. Of the evil methods it may be premised that they are the shadows and perverted forms of the wholesome way; the homage of imitation and imperfection that vice pays to virtue and its attainment. The vulgar drunkard, for instance, enters after his own manner a spurious temple of the Mysteries to seek the joys of the pothouse, and his cup runneth over as surely, if in a grosser fashion, as his who is inebriated by the mystic Grail in the sanctuary of his own soul. The exhilaration of the aviator is a low-grade replica of that of the religious aspirant who, sighing for the wings of a dove, learns to soar — *superasque evadere ad auras* — otherwise than in modern airships. But the mild delights of the bottle and the thrills accruing from venturesome sports pale to nothingness before the gorgeous illuminations of consciousness inducible by certain drugs and anaesthetics. Few, however, care to undertake the experiences of the opium and hashish eater in view of the reaction and inexorable penalty exacted by outraged Nature from those who wilfully or through moral infirmity explore the caverns and abysses of the subliminal mind. Of recent years experimental psychology has probed this matter, and Professor James has described very graphically the effects upon himself of intoxication by nitrous-oxide gas. There is produced, he says, an intense and rapturous metaphysical illumination in which truth lies open to the view in depth beneath depth of almost blinding evidence; where subject and object, *meum* and *tuum*, the centre and periphery of things, become one; and where one becomes consciously blended with the Infinite.

Important philosophical deductions result from these experiments and a treatise upon The Anaesthetic Revelation by an American citizen is, in its way, of undoubted educational value.* [* See Prof. James's The Will to Believe, pp. 294-8 ; and his article in the Hibbert Journal, July, 1910.] But what is the effect of these practices upon the personal organism of the experimenter? It will vary in individuals proportionately to their native moral or immoral condition, and it may be assumed that in the morally degenerate the results would be much more appalling than those attending alcoholic delirium. But even the average clean-minded man, actuated by the good motive of scientific inquiry, testifies in the person of Professor James himself that he is left with " the sense of a dreadful and ineluctable fate; a pessimistic fatalism; depth within depth of impotence and indifference ; . . . terminating either in a laugh at the ultimate nothingness, or in a mood of vertiginous amazement at a meaningless infinity." So far, then, so bad; even at the best. The immature Icarus flying to the sun, gets his wings scorched for his pains and falls back into a sea of trouble.

Contraband illuminism is obtainable also by certain oriental yoga-practices and by the frenzy of the dance as exemplified by the whirling dervish who performs his gyrations with the object of deadening the senses and awakening higher centres of consciousness than those to which the

senses are the portal. The dance has been used in the rites of sanctity, and perhaps even in connexion with the Christian Mass; but it has also served in the mysteries of iniquity as a sensuous and illicit attempt to capture elements latent in the depths of human nature to the legitimate possession of which that nature has not yet attained. This latter was the classic sin of Prometheus in stealing the Divine Fire and using it for carnal ends. But it is perhaps little known that the excitation of psychic passion and the promoting a spurious ecstasy by unlocking an imprisoned essence which, by its proper user, may be suffered to act as the purifier and baptizer of the lower nature, is illustrated, beneath a thick veil of dramatic imagery, in the biblical reference to the lascivious dancing-woman whose object was to reduce into possession what is figuratively described as " the head of John the Baptist in a charger."

The practices of Theurgy and Ceremonial Magic are cognate in character to those already named. At their best (if the epithet be not an abuse) they are attempts, undercover of pseudo-dedications of sanctity, to stimulate and exercise occult faculties by constraining to the ends of selfish gratification subhuman intelligences and forces that mercifully remain unmanifested to our ordinary perceptions; at their worst, and even at a stage far anterior to that, they are unnameable abominations. As one of the great series of studies upon the varied manifestations of the Secret Tradition in Christian times upon which Mr. A. E. Waite has now for long been engaged we have before us an elaborate volume, The Book of Ceremonial Magic;* [* *The Book of Ceremonial Magic*, including the Rites and Mysteries of Goetic Theurgy, Sorcery and Infernal Necromancy. By A. E. Waite. 376 pp. with 180 engravings and plates. William Rider & Son, Ltd.] a most comprehensive treatise in that it supplies the texts of all the chief magical rituals extant, describes the methods and operations, and supplies much historical and critical commentary. But the author's avowed purpose being to show that Magic, Sorcery, Necromancy and their cognates are perverse corruptions and fungoid growths upon a body of doctrine that is high and holy, the book is negative rather than positive in value; its motive is that of the Spartan fathers when they paraded drunken helots in the presence of their sons; namely, to show them something well worth avoiding.

That definite results accrue from magical practices is of course indubitable, but if from following them one were to gain the whole world, or even an inconsiderable portion of it, there is probably no surer way by which to disintegrate eventually one's own soul. It is significant that these operations demand from their devotees preparations as arduous as, and certainly far more ingenious and troublesome than, are required from those who aim at that genuine occult wisdom of which art-magic is the complementary foolishness. The doctrine of both prescribes rigorous discipline of body and mind, but whilst in the one case the end proposed is that of assisting the Divine in man to find its rest in the Divine in the Universe, in the other it is to provoke auto-hypnosis and self-hallucination, to indulge in vanity and self-glory, to truckle with obscene powers, to steal nefarious marches upon and influence the freewill of one's neighbour, and to obtain abnormal facilities for practising lewdness unperceived. *Corruptio optimi pessima*; or as S. Francis of Sales once said in taking the pure and sweet scented lily as the symbol of the perfected soul, there is no scent so foully malodorous as that of rotten lilies. Mr Waite has performed considerable service, though doubtless a disagreeable task, in collating the literature of Ceremonial Magic, in indicating its methods and aims, and especially in demonstrating the invalidity of the distinction popularly made between magic that is thought to be White and that which is admittedly Black. It is perhaps too much to hope that efforts towards attaining artificial illuminism or that the prostituted use of occult powers will cease to be made as the result of this volume, but, so far as literature can pronounce it, for all but the ignorant, the imbecile, or the wantonly wicked, this book is as the Last Judgement thereupon.

One turns with relief from contemplating the ways of vanity and evil, to the one remaining path leading to the true ecstasy and veritable Magia ; the path which I have said above is alone legitimate and safe as it alone is to be computed genuine occultism and the only one worth any one's while to pursue. Given the fact, which lies at the basis of all occultism, that high and hidden centres of consciousness and power exist sealed up within the human organism, there exist also

alternative ways of unlocking them. One is by forced, illicit methods conducing inevitably to mental and moral disintegration; the other is by a "graduated-fire" and methods inducing legitimate and normal growth towards, and ultimate absorption in, the focal source and holy centre of all consciousness and power, where, voided of all vain desires and in utter immunity from any peril, the soul

In the ultimate Heart's occult abode

May lie as in an oubliette of God.

As regards the former of these methods the best of all authorities stigmatised as thieves and robbers those who sought to " climb up into the sheepfold by some other way " than that of growth in grace and sanctity and through the strait gate and narrow way prescribed by the law and the order; whilst a lesser one who learned the Secret Doctrine independently of the Christian fold has also testified that those few who find the hidden door legitimately are such as have been found specially worthy to be interiorly illumined or have won their title to the heights by an inflaming passion for holiness;

Pauci, quos aequus amavit

Jupiter, aut ardens evexit ad aethera virtus,

Dis geniti potuere.

[Virgil, A en. VI. 129—131.]

I will add but one word, lest Mr. Waite's new volume should by any be thought negligible because it treats of a subject that is so. In a succinct and powerful introduction he has himself provided the antidote and counter-thesis to the main subject-matter of his book. No terser summary, yet no more explicit and luminous exposition of the one legitimate occult path, as often defined and often traversed during the age of Christendom, has to my knowledge appeared in public literature. And at a time when many minds are seeking for sound counsel and feeling after the true way, and yet when, to meet this demand, glittering temptations exist to divert them towards spurious and dangerous processes, Mr Waite's introductory pages to the collated records of Pseudo-occultism come as a warning to inexperienced aspirants and as a trumpet-challenge that says, "Choose ye this day whom you will serve !"